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ABSTRACT

This curriculum bulletin discusses a program teaching creative writing to fifth and sixth grade children in an attempt to improve the quality of written English. These children wrote briefly every day throughout the school year. Every area of the written language curriculum was covered. Each student wrote letters, reports, stories, editorial essays, news stories, poetry, descriptions, and jingles. Samples of the students' writings on all these topics, as well as the stimuli used to provide the writing, are presented. Students wrote on approaching holidays and seasons, emotions, colors, and sensory impressions. They also described objects and people and composed stories from interesting situations. (LL)

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WRITING IS THE FUNNEST THING: TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING

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WRITING IS THE FUNNEST THING: TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING

Janet Witter and Don Emberlin

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"The Beginning"

"What did you like best?" the children were asked in an end-of-the-year questionnaire. "Writing," they answered, as they summed up their reactions to the year's program offered during a morning block of time given to the combined Language Arts: reading, writing, and spelling. As a ten-year-old charmingly put it, "I like it all, but writing is the funnest thing."

These boys and girls had written briefly every day during the school year, in every area covered by the usual written language curriculum. Each student had written letters, reports, stories, editorial essays, news items, poetry, descriptions, and jingles, filling page after page in his own spiral notebook. Proofreading and sometimes rewriting had taken place; spelling and grammar errors were noted and corrections were made, often with written notations, by the teacher. This was not a program planned for "fun," but was, on the other hand, a very serious effort improving the quality of written English. Because daily reading of class work would be demanded of the teacher and because quality, not quantity, of expression was the aim of the writing period, students were held to short assignments and were encouraged to plan to use a half-sheet only, or a

single paragraph, as a guage of length. The work was directed expressly toward writing exercise and improvement. Why, then did the children like writing best?

The pleasure a child derives from writing experiences is the very deep satisfaction of building communication, of being able to organize and express his own viewpoint so that it has meaning and form for himself as well as for others. He is communicating with himself in a serious and concrete way before he can begin to set words upon paper, and it is this act of clarification of thought which makes the writing period so vital a part of the language arts program.

The apparent goal to be reached through a program of daily writing is a measurable growth in skills in written expression, in punctuation, in paragraphing, in spelling, in form; but the "funnest thing" for the writer is the joy of creating from his own hodge-podge of thoughts and feelings something worth saying in the first place. Learning how to give written form to an idea has meaning only for the student who recognizes that he <u>has</u> an "idea" to express. Practice helps, and through daily writing children grow visably in locating and formulating their thoughts as well as in expressing them more skillfully in written English, with growth in idea-selection demanding more skill in writing, and with learned skills attracting and permitting the statement of more complicated ideas.

For the intermediate student the greatest block to writing is lack of an idea, especially of an idea worth communicating to other persons. He may be a continuous talker, but when faced with the comparative permanence of a written paper, his very soul shrinks, and he cannot write at all because he cannot locate a thought worthy of statement. Or he may want to rely on copying from the encyclopedia in order to put something acceptable on the paper. Or he may write exactly as he talks, formlessly, endlessly, without discrimination and without learning anything. First of all the student needs help in finding his thoughts, in feeling free to state them, and he needs help toward choosing the vocabulary which best expresses them.

Motivation toward writing is two-fold: the teacher must encourage the students to want to write, through stirring their interest, but he must also help them to achieve a written response that is satisfying to the writer. Without help in thought organization, without help in recognizing an appropriate vocabulary range, even the child who wants to write can be truly lost and wandering among the countless possibilities and immensities of the English language, and will perhaps not have the satisfaction of crystalizing his thoughts for clear expression. Often simply through considering vocabulary and through discussing a variety of points of view, children are able to find something worthwhile to say, and will say it well, whether or not they started the period "wanting to write." "Wanting" is not enough, for most children.

Much has been written about "creativity" in

recent years. The use of the word "creative" as a label for imaginative written work in the language setting has somehow made the very teaching of writing a difficult and obscure act to perform. It has a mysterious and hands-off aura which implies that somehow the form and syntax will fall into place magically as the creator is inspired, and it implies also that there are two kinds of writing, "creative" and "uncreative." That all interesting writing is truly creative should be an accepted fact. Certainly any adult can stand in awe before the great originality and freshness of vision children bring to their written observations. The motivation for writing in a classroom situation must not channel children's minds in a teacher-structured total direction, but must open many channels for those children who have perhaps never considered the problem at hand and who need help in thinking about it. The variety of viewpoints expressed in the language notebooks of a single class of fifth and sixth grade students shows how widely the blessing of "creativity" has been naturally bestowed.

The children whose writings are given here are all competent readers. Only four of the students had ever participated in a specific writing program, and most of the class had written only infrequently, or as a requirement by the need of making reports in the social studies or science areas. They had been brought together from three different schools by the building of a new school and the subsequent rezoning of the district, and comprised a reading group of twenty-four pupils working at sixth grade level with homerooms consisting of one sixth and two fifth grades. On the whole they had very little understanding of grammar and many were poor spellers; they made up a very normal, inquisitive, impatient, humorous class.

At the beginning the children showed only mild originality. However the usual writings about "My Vacation" and "My Autobiography," "My Favorite Hobby" and "My Pet" were conveniently productive of word lists for purposes of spelling improvement, and gave the teacher some acquaintance with each pupil's background and individuality as well as with his strengths and weaknesses in writing. As the year went along, more lively topics and problems brought out more interesting writings.

"Columbus Day"

All writing was performed during class time after some discussion of the subject matter and of methods and word choices most applicable. Often poetry was read aloud, and always a list of words was compiled on the chalkboard for reference and vocabulary extension as the discussion progressed. For example, on Columbus Day the group celebrated by reading aloud Joaquin Miller's poem, "Columbus." They discussed the rigors of sailing-ship travel, of facing the unknown, the loneliness of a leader, and the appearance of the sea itself. Such words appeared on the board as "surf," "foam," "billows," "froth." Finally the question was asked, "What did the sea or sails look like? Can you find a simile

so that the reader can see as you see?" Then the class settled down to write. Many of the students wrote in the following vein:

> One day Columbus stood on deck.
> He looked into the surf.
> He saw the frothy waves beating against the ship.
> Columbus looked up; the sails looked like great white eagles
> Flapping their wings against the wind.
> He looked all around him.
> It seemed like a world of his own.
>
> Elizabeth (grade 6)

Elizabeth had written in a poetic "shape," not in paragraph form, but had not tried to find rhyme as she described very well a moment of time. Many children wrote a simple paragraph, and a few wrote in rhyme. Reed amused himself, and the class, with this historically inaccurate but thoughtful jingle:

> Columbus was a nutty man,
> That's what his sailors said,
> But when they found that he was right
> They practically fell dead.
>
> Magellan sailed around the world
> Upon the silky foam
> And after he had made his trip
> He was glad to be at home.
>
> Explorers must have been very brave
> To face the dangers hard,
> But all the sailors ever got
> Was an occasional get-well card.
>
> Reed (5)

Although each child has his own way of expressing his ideas, the influence of the class discussion and vocabulary listing is easily traceable in these very unlike compositions. Each child is seriously manipulating the words to achieve his goal in both content and form, and is selecting with great care what he actually writes, as erasures and crossed-out lines in his notebook testify.

Children's interest is totally held by whatever unusual is happening just outside the classroom windows. There is little a teacher can bring to the class that can compete for attention against fresh snowfall or drifting fog, and the writing teacher recognizes immediately his great fortune in the dramatic material so handily framed for classroom use.

"Fog (with simile and metaphor)"

One October morning the fog obscured the nearest wing of the building and made mere ghosts of the shrubbery. Carl Sandburg's "Fog," brief and thick with metaphor, is the best introduction to writing about fog in an interesting way, and so it was read aloud as the children watched the changing landscape. Discussion of simile and metaphor followed, and of personification. Does the sun come on "cat feet." No, thought the class, the sun would more aptly arrive on "tiger feet." Various comparisons were made and descriptive phrases including the meteorological "100% humidity" were listed for reference. During the discussion all eyes were on the windows, and as they wrote, the children gazed often at the fog.

Here are samples of their work, done in fifteen minutes or much less after at least twenty minutes of thoughtful discussion:

> A big gray bear comes creeping in, all by its lonely self. It covers the hills and it covers the streets as everybody turns on their lights. When you look into this fog, you can see the gray bear that is looking down on our school.
>
> Mark W. (6)

> Home is near, you say to yourself, but the creeping cold makes you call for help.
>
> Mike (5)

Fog is a creature from another world.
It floats down into our atmosphere to devour us in its midst.
We are unaware of its coming.
We are blind when it is here.
It can make cars look like tremendous cats with glaring eyes of fire.
It can make trees look like monsters with millions of arms ready to catch us.
We never know when fog will come and we never know when it will go.

Neal (5)

The fog is mysterious.
It creeps through the night
Like a bird without wings
In its sorrowful plight.

It sneaks here and there
While growing old
Like a huge gray snake
Covering the world.

Like a large misty scroll
Unfurling during the night,
Like a leopard ready to spring
Or a bird ready for flight.

But nothing can live forever
They always say,
So the sun's heating rays
Will melt it away.

Renée (6)

And finally, here is a light-hearted rhyme by a girl not easily frightened by weather conditions:

The way it creeps,
The way it's bold
Makes me want
To shiver with cold.

As pretty as a snowflake,
As beautiful as a star,
I think the fog is lots funner
Than anything by far.

Connie (5)

"Hunting Season"

Autumn brought the hunting season as the reading text provided a story, "The Trail of the Sand Hill Stag," by Ernest Thompson Seton. The poem, "Four Little Foxes," by Lew Sarett was read aloud and the class considered the forest and the animals. Other poems read were "The Concrete Trap" and "Autumn Dirge" by Elizabeth Coatsworth. Some of the children wrote, one day, paragraphs about going hunting with their fathers, but two girls were touched by the plight of the baby animals, and they both wanted to rhyme:

THE BABY FOX

One day I saw a baby fox,
His coat all shiny and red.
But alas, it had no mother
Or even a bush for a bed.

I took him home and fed him well
And made him a little bed--
I got up in the morning to see how he was
And I found him lying there dead.

Elizabeth (6)

(from) THE FAWN

I was out a-walking
And I came upon a fawn
Just new-born
At the break of dawn.

But then I saw a footprint
Of a person, passing through
And where he laid his rifle
On the soft new dew.

Well, I took the fawn upon my knee
Then started homeward.
It seemed like a pity to me
Because a fawn should have her own mother.

Janet (6)

Janet had written six stanzas in which she found it progressively difficult to hold to rhythm and rhyme, and had finished by being discontented with her poem except that she had truly said what she wanted to say. "Well, how can I make it work?" she asked. "I want to make it rhyme today." The teacher congratulated her upon her forthright refusal to force a rhyme in the last

stanza. Many times a child had asked, at the beginning of the year, "Is it all right if I write a poem?" The answer was always, "Of course, if you remember to keep your thought and not spoil it through insisting on a rhyme just for rhyme's sake."

"Halloween, in rhyme and rhythm"

Halloween provided a happy opportunity for rhythm and rhyme practice without concern about "spoiling the thought." There simply isn't much thought in the contemporary child's Halloween. The word list on the board grew quickly: eerie, weird, ghost, shriek, phantom, goblins, skeletons, moans. Then for a change, to establish a feeling for metrical beat and rhyme, the class cooperated in a group "song" to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," just as a primary experience chart is written. Lines were called out and decided upon as the class added to the teacher's beginning line:

Halloween is coming soon,
Cats are howling at the moon,
A witch is flying on her broom,
Over the moonlit sky she'll zoom,
Skeletons will shake their bones,
Ghosts will cry their eerie moans.

Enthusiastic singing followed, then the question, "What other tune could we use for a pattern?" Someone sang, "One Little, Two Little, Three Little Indians," and the delighted class was off again on the gruesome trail:

One little, two little, three little vampires,
Boil the blood over sizzling campfires,
Throw in the referees, throw in the umpires,
Heigh, ho! Halloween's here!

Sometimes a teacher motivates an avalanche and may as well give up and enjoy the wild ride downhill. The notebooks were songbooks that day, as the children wrote their parodies for familiar tunes and read them to each other with truly vast amusement. They sang them, too, so that the rhythm obviously needed to be correct. Here are samples:

(I've Been Working on the Railroad)

I've been working in the graveyard
All the live-long night,
Finding bodies for the vampires,
Just digging with all my might.
Finding two for every vampire,
Saving some for bats,
I've been working in the graveyard
With goblins thin and fat.

Renée (6)

(Old MacDonald Had a Farm)

Old McGhoul had a grave, Scream, and Scream,
and Scream!
And in that grave he had a corpse, Scream, and
Scream, and Scream!
With a body here, and a body there,
Here a body, there a body, everywhere a body, body,
Old McGhoul had a grave, Scream, and Scream,
and Scream!

Neal (5)

There were several equally horrifying verses in "Old McGhoul." Criticism of the work was, however, not at all of the subject matter (since it is not the child's fault that he is exposed by commerce to horror movies, ugly comic books, and such strange survivals as our Halloween) but was concerned with the rhythm and rhyme patterns only. The teacher wrote "I can't make it sing." "It doesn't fit the tune after this line." or "I don't think broom rhymes with moon, do you?" as notes to the authors in their notebooks.

The next day these writings appeared after discussion of ancient beliefs, of superstitions and our current celebrations, and after some singing of the previous day's songs:

This Halloween there will be a witch
Riding in reckless flight,
Calling the spirits from their graves,
Warning them when it gets bright,

Telling them when to get into their graves
Telling them to be brave,
Warning them with her screeching call
If they want their souls to be saved.

Renée (6)

Halloween is a frightening night,
It's no time to boast,
'Cause you're as scared as anyone--
Maybe even the most.

So don't rave
That you're brave.
If you see a witch
You will certainly behave!

Jim (6)

On Halloween the witch was out
A-knocking at the door.
A man came out a-wondering--
He looked a little poor.

The witch said, "Trick or treat!" just then,
But he didn't have a treat
So the man gave her a penny
And the witch trotted off down the street.

Rhonda (6)

Originally Rhonda had written her fourth line as:

"Who would be at the door."

This was a sensible line, but the teacher called her attention to the monotonous similarity to line two, and Rhonda went back to her desk to revise. After playing with several rhymes, she decided upon this version because it "seems to give the man more personality." Certainly her use of "trotted" in the last line shows that the writer is already aware of how clearly personality can be described through the thoughtful choice of the one right word.

"Chrysanthemums"

One day the teacher brought chrysanthemums in a mixed bouquet of various colors and shapes. "What are they like? How can we describe them? Are they pretty? Make up your own mind after you look carefully, but choose words that will give the reader a picture of these flowers, not merely flowers in general, and how you see them, not how anybody or everybody might see them." As always, the children rose to the occasion with comments. These flowers were like stars, octopuses, spiders, hands snatching, and suns, and perhaps they were really rather ugly, although no one wanted to say so. They wrote:

Some are green, with flowers like long light green teeth ready to bite you . .

Billy (5)

The flowers have long arm-like tentacles. They're like wiggly little animals on stems. It seems like they would glow if you put them in the dark.

Neal (5)

Yellowish-green chrysanthemums resemble small suns with unfurling rays of sunlight. They look like long yellow fingers uncurling in the sun.

Renée (6)

Kathy seems to be reassuring herself in her last line, as if her imagination had gone too far and needed restraint:

All the chrysanthemums
Were put together
With their emerald and orchid,
And their reds and yellows.
But all together they look like
Many, many big starfish
On a giant coastal rock.
But all they are, are little
Chrysanthemums.

Kathy (6)

"November, the Dull!"

The reading of Thomas Hood's poem, "No." started the class writing about the duller

aspects of the autumn season:

THE FALL

The fall is so dreary,
So weary, so eery,
And sometimes it's scary:
The fall is a mess.

The trees lose their green-ness,
Their lovely serene-ness,
The people are spiritless:
Fall is a mess.

Renée (6)

On the other hand "Glimpse in Autumn" by Jean Starr Untermeyer, and both Edwin Curran's and Emily Dickinson's poems, "Autumn," brought out the cheerier side. Girls especially seem to like to address the elements directly, in a personal way:

WINDS

Oh Wind that blows the rushing trees,
Oh Wind which has such a changing breeze,
The grassy hills that are windly blown,
The beautiful farms which are nicely sown,
You blow the leaves of late fall,
You blow like a giant, then you whisper small.

Elizabeth (6)

"Dedication"
(of Seth Lewelling School; symbols)

A new school is usually honored by a dedication ceremony of some kind, and it was decided that the service should involve the children as far as possible. Thinking in terms of verse choir, a lengthy search was made for suitable material to be read chorally, and none was found. It became evident that if the children were to participate, the children must also provide the choral readings, which would necessarily be carefully written, historically accurate, full of real meaning, and both readable and listenable. With a large amount of hope and faith, with little else at hand, the teacher set out to help the writing class express, in appreciative spirit, the meaning of the school and its name.

Seth Lewelling, for whom the school was named, was a local pioneer nurseryman whose story the children knew. There remained the necessity for connecting the man with the school so that the name would have more than a remote historical meaning for the children themselves. A study of symbols and symbolism seemed to be in order, as well as a review of the man himself. The children were not told of the ultimate goal in this writing assignment, but the discussions for two days were aimed at the greatest possible depth of thought and understanding.

The first discussion was concerned with a variety of symbols. The first chapter of General Language by Lindquist and Wachner was read aloud and familiar symbols were listed and drawn on the board. The boys and girls enjoyed viewing language itself as a collection of "symbols."

The second morning found William Blake's "To See a World in a Grain of Sand" written on the board, to be read and examined for symbolism in its brief four lines. The questions the teacher asked were, "Is a school a symbol? Is this school only a building? Is a school at all like a garden? Can you compare a gardener with a teacher? Might Seth Lewelling as a pioneer be a symbol of the whole of early Milwaukie? Is it an interesting coincidence that the pioneer for whom our school was named was a scientific

nurseryman? We know he was a kind man, and wise, and that our school bears a proud name. Can you write about all these things, about how our school got its name?" We read aloud Robert Nathan's "Watch America" and "The Pioneer" by Arthur Guiterman, wrote a vocabulary of horticulture on the chalkboard, and the children took up their pencils confidently and unhesitatingly. The teacher could not have written as well as the children, nor been able to say what they so beautifully and sincerely said:

SCHOOL

School is a symbol of learning and knowledge, a symbol of love and hope of all mankind. Love enough for children to have a better life, hope that they'll go on with their schooling, love and hope enough to build 'em a new school.

Seth Lewelling was a very hard worker for mankind. Seth grew, tended, nursed, and created Bing cherries. I think Seth Lewelling is a good name for our new School.

Debbie (6)

THE SEED

A hoe, a shovel, and a tree seed--
Dig a hole, drop in the seed,
You have planted a house, a school.
All mankind needs it.
Yes, a tree works wonders in the hands of man.

Mike (5)

SETH LEWELLING

Seth Lewelling came here, West,
And planted many wines
And they were the very best
Of every fruit in kind.

Then he took the root so very wild
And on them put his grafts,
Then came the fruit so big and mild.
He made a great strong path

For all the people passing by.
He was so very proud,
But now no one remembers him
There's hardly any doubt.
And now I go to a school named this
And people remember him
For all that he has done for us
And for his fellow-men.

Janet (6)

HOW OUR SCHOOL GOT ITS NAME

Once there was a man
Named Seth Lewelling.
He tended,
He nursed,
He created,
Then he grafted
And budded.
He worked.
He worked with Nature
And finally he created
Many, many cherries,
Bing Cherries,
Black Republican Cherries,
And the Golden Prune.
Then some people thought
What shall we name that new school?
"I know," said one, "Let's name it
Seth Lewelling.
He was a great man, you know,
He worked with Nature
And we hope our teachers do the same.
He had a hope and love for Nature
Like our teachers have a hope and love
for children."
And that's how our school got its name.

Kathy (6)

SETH LEWELLING

Why did Seth Lewelling grow fruit trees?
Why didn't he go to California with his
brother to mine for gold?
Why did Seth Lewelling grow fruit trees?

Did he grow them for their taste?
Or did he grow them to become important?
Why did Seth Lewelling grow fruit trees?

Did he grow them for the people?
Or did he grow them for the money?
Why did Seth Lewelling grow fruit trees?

He grew them to create something,
To make something grow, to live.
That's why Seth Lewelling grew fruit trees.

Cynthia (5)

There were many well stated dedicatory thoughts in the notebooks, most of them carefully set down in a pattern or form on the page, the

sentences broken into lines purposefully for pleasure of shaping the thought further than is visually apparent in a prose paragraph. The visual pattern became more important to the children as they wrote more and more expressively. These writers were so very serious and so intent upon both content and appearance of the writing that the teacher was astounded at the finish and polish of the compositions, as well as touched by the messages themselves. Cynthia was one of the few who wanted or needed help. She held up her three stanzas of questions with a puzzled look, as if there were something wrong. "Well, Cynthia, you've asked just the right questions. Now, please--why did he?" And Cynthia went off and wrote her final stanza.

Because of the simple, uncomplicated statement of the rich theme, the authors had the joy of hearing various classes give their poems in choral reading at the dedication ceremony, a true, meaningful dedication from the heart!

"Thanksgiving"

Late November always brings sheaves of essays entitled "Why I Am Thankful" and "The First Thanksgiving." Over the United States teachers are trying to guide supermarket-fed highly-sheltered children to an understanding of gratitude for the harvest, for seasonal bounty. This is not an easy task in our world of frozen food, turkey in July and strawberries in December. The culinary seasons have lost their meaning. The class discussed these facts, but wrote as they could:

Today we are so thankful
For the food that is so good
And for the Pilgrims who came here
Through all that they had stood.

They made friends with Indians
And shared their food and wares
And then they had a dinner there
With meat both dark and rare.

Janet (6)

That day four hundred years ago
Our fathers got together
To have a big Thanksgiving blow
In very windy weather.

One Indian took the drumstick
And sunk his teeth into it
But when he got a taste of it
He got sick and threw it.

Mike (5)

The thought seemed to be much less important to the class as a whole than were the problems of rhythm and rhyme. One boy was chuckling to himself, admiring his notebook, happy in his triumph over both thought and grammar:

Thanksgiving is coming soon,
Turkeys are gobbling at the spoon.
Now I can hardly wait--
It doesn't seem that I've ever ate!

Dale (5)

But another fifth-grader summed up the discussion:

In old times at Thanksgiving
There was a lot to be thankful for.
They were thankful for their harvest
And the fish upon the shore.

When we celebrate Thanksgiving
All we do is play
And eat a lot of good food--
How much it's hard to say.

We don't have all the hardships
All the Pilgrims had,
And that's why at Thanksgiving
We are not that glad.

Reed (5)

"Christmas"
(and the Winter Solstice)

Chriscmas, unlike Thanksgiving, has real meanings in great variety for children. Their heads are full of the rhythms and rhymes of the great Christmas carols and hymns, of their own family traditions, and they look at the tree and celebrate the Birthday with the deepest admiration and wonder and zest. Unfortunately, the rich background of this holiday is not universally appreciated, and children expressed twinges of guilt as they spoke of the sheer fun of decorating the tree and exchanging gifts. "We shouldn't do that so much," they warned. "That tree has nothing to do with Christmas." Others agreed, "Nor Santa Claus, either, really. The way we celebrate is not right and everybody knows it." But a few children spoke out defiantly for the child's right to hunt down his presents, for the ask-and-it-shall-be-given approach to Christmas. For two weeks the class wrote about "Christmas," from many viewpoints, discussion and marveling at the complexity of traditions woven into our contemporary Christmas, listing the various symbols, and gaining some historical perspective.

To set the ancient background of seasonal rites, the annual orbit of the earth around the sun was reviewed, as ceremonies at the vernal and autumnal equinoxes and the solstices were read about and talked about. The autumn "death" of the trees, the conspicuous living green of the evergreens and mistletoe, primitive man's attempt to account for the strange departures and returnings of the vital sun were all fascinating for the children. Egyptian, Mayan, Aztec, and Druid concern with the meanings of seasonal changes were seen to be world-wide and fundamental to both myth and science, as early man tried to understand his natural world.

WINTER SOLSTICE

He stared at the sky,
Shivered in the cold,
And whispered, "Sun, come back."

He didn't know
In those days of old
That it would be back.

He prayed all day
And then all night
But it wouldn't come back.

He killed his best ox
With an ax of gold
But it didn't come back.

He did all he could
With all his might.
But it didn't come back.

He made resolutions
While worried but bold.
But it didn't come back.

But at the coming of Spring
Trees came back to life!
For the sun was back.

Renée (6)

The Christmas story itself is full of wonder and beauty and children never tire of re-envisioning and retelling it, in their fashion. There were prints of famous masterpieces of painting pinned to the long bulletin boards as the children wrote to answer, "How did it look? How did it sound that night?"

THE STAR

People from
Both near and far.
Were following the star.

To the manger,
Known and Stranger,
Bringing their gifts.

Angels on high,
Singing with joy
For the Lord's own Boy.

Jim (6)

THE WISE MEN

The Wise Men three looked up and saw
A brightly shining star.
They started walking toward the East
With myrrh and spice in a jar.

One was dressed in beautiful silks,
And leather sandals for shoes.
On his head he wore a cape
Of many different hues.

Another had on a satin robe
Of beautiful glowing white,
And as he came near the glistening star
It began to shine very bright.

The last King wore a glittering crown
Of many different jewels,
And of course behind him, walking still,
Were a few silent mules.

Elizabeth (6)

Elizabeth had gone to the paintings again and again, looking very closely at the Botticelli "Magi."

CHRISTMAS EVE

The beautiful star on Christmas Eve
With its points all glowing bright,
The shepherds saw the beautiful star--
It was the everlasting light.

Mary's bright voice in the stable low
And her eyes that shown so bright
Made her so very pretty,
And everything was right.

Janet (6)

Echoes of Christmas carol vocabulary and song rhythms appear in these writings, as well as such familiar metrical beats as those of "A Visit from St. Nicholas," which children often use because they enjoy the rhythm itself.

Another day the children wrote about the inconsistencies they see in our Christmas observance. "How should we view Christmas? Is there a message to be conveyed?"

I don't think that Christmas is a time to be thinking, "I know where the presents are and I think I'll go and open them." Christmas is a time to be joyful, not greedy!

Richard (5)

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

We must have the Christmas Spirit
And we must let others hear it,
Tell about the dark, damp stable,
Show them that it's not a fable.

Mary'd never heard of a Christmas tree
Nor had the Kings upon their knee.
Jealous priests endangered their lives
But God kept them safe from Herod's knives.

So let us have a Christmas tree
And sing the Christmas carols
About God, who kept that family free
From many dangerous perils.

Renée (6)

Some boys and girls respond more readily to a story approach than to abstractions or to "messages." The writer of the following composition found research papers much easier to write than imaginative work, and he was proud of this sally into the realm of "poetry." The rhyme and form were a real achievement for him and must have been the outgrowth of the general class interest in poetry anthologies and of the frequent reading aloud of all types of poems including narrative poems and ballads.

THE LITTLE TREE

I was in a great big forest,
But such a little tree
That when Christmas came around
They never chopped down me.

I was a beautiful little thing
In the year of sixty-three,
But do you think they'd chop down
A little old thing like me?

But the next year I saw something
That changed my mind a bit:
I saw some workmen come in
With a power-saw kit.

They chopped down
My neighboring tree,
And now I don't want them
To chop down little ol' me.

Mark Q. (6)

"Suppose you could imagine a Christmas tree and make it come true, merely through thinking about it. What kind of tree would it be? Pink? A house near mine had a tree in the window with purple velvet bows and purple ornaments last year. What do you think of that?" The teacher started the class toward writing detailed descriptions, and as the pupils voiced their disapproval of purple bows and offered their own choice of color schemes, imaginary trees began to take shape clearly enough to describe. "Because the one adjective we'll all use too often is 'shiny,' let's list some words we can substitute to make reading our descriptions more interesting." Onto the board went: glittering, shimmering, gleaming, glowing, sparkling, glistening, brilliant, flashing. As each word was written, its appropriate use was discussed and questions asked to clarify the shades of meaning. "If my eyes sparkle when you speak to me, is that the same as if they glitter?" "Oh, no! If your eyes glitter, I'll be afraid of you! You're probably a thief." A "glitter" is hard but a "shimmer" is soft, decided the group, and a "sparkle" is something in between.

MY CHRISTMAS TREE

From the bottom to the top it shines,
The glittering ornaments show in the dark.
Angel hair so soft and golden, the colored lights, and the star upon the top all help to make the season bright. With shimmering tinsel hanging, everything glistens on my Christmas tree.

Mike (5)

My tree would be higher than the clouds. It would be flocked in the lightest blue. It would be by the clearest lake, so that every reflection would be like a mirror. It would stand on a crown of shimmering blue stars. It would have deep blue ornaments on every swaying branch. On Christmas Day the angels would come down and place the most beautiful star in the sky upon my tree, and then, and only then, would my tree be completed.

Connie (5)

One day the class wrote about the sounds and smells of Christmas. First they shut their eyes and remembered how Christmas at home sounded, the shoppers in the streets, how trees and holiday foods smelled, and as they remembered, they discussed these memories and shared them with each other. "Fragrance," "scent," "odor" and "aroma" were listed as other ways to say "smell." As usual the writings were much less similar than were the shared experiences:

Jingle go the bells. Shatter goes the window when the snowball hits. We hear the song of the carolers singing, the sound of children laughing and playing, mothers yelling, Santas ho-ho-ing, and people eating. Everyone is having fun.

Mike (5)

The sounds of wrapping-paper are all different. Some wrapping paper is very stiff and makes a crackling noise, but some is soft and velvety and hardly makes a noise at all.

Debbie (6)

On Christmas morning I get up and smell the smoky smell of ham and eggs. After we eat breakfast, we go upstairs and open our presents. I hear the rustling of paper and the "Oh, boys" and the "Gee, thanks" and the cat making the bell on the Christmas tree

ring; and on top of that I smell the
sweet fragrance of the Christmas tree.

Neal (5)

Another view of the Christmas story is given in the following poem which sounds somehow very medieval, like an old carol as it begins:

Christ was born
on Christmas day
And over here we were
very gay
To learn that Christ was
finally born.
But when he died his
clothes were torn,
Upon the cross
where Jesus lay,
A spear in his side,
some people say.
On his head there lay
a wreath,
And blood came out
with every breathe.

Mark W. (6)

"Calendars (in couplets)"

After the excitement of the holidays the prospect of school and daily writing was a bleak one for teacher as well as for pupil. What could possibly be of interest? The only fresh material in the room seemed to be the new calendar. After reading aloud Sara Coleridge's "The Garden Year" and Christina Rossetti's "The Months," the class was eager to try their hands at similar calendar compositions, rhyming in couplets. To hasten the thought processes and give everyone as many choices of ideas as possible, the class pooled an interesting list of annual seasonal events. The months were written in sequence on the chalkboard, and beside each month typical events and holidays were recorded. When looking for a rhyme, then, the child had variety within easy reach. For example, "June" could mean "brides," "school's out" or "graduation;" and for one boy it meant:

June is half-past-January.

Les (6)

The children wrote easily and well, with one hand on the dictionary and very little obvious struggle for rhyme. At the beginning of the year many of the pupils had not seen the rhyming structure as it is usually written. They simple wrote along, letting their rhymes fall anywhere within the lines, which would be in usual paragraph style. Composed by a sophisticated poet, this could be an interesting method, but as written by children it is very difficult to read aloud, to locate the metrical pulse, or to enjoy the rhyme scheme itself. Notes appeared in booklets, with vertical lines after each rhyming word, "Your rhymes are interesting! Rewrite, please, starting a new line after each rhyme so the rhymed words are at the ends of the lines, and then show me the pattern you see." Because the sentences ran along through the lines, the work developed a flow from line to line quite unusual among children, who often confuse "lines" with "sentences" and automatically hear and set a period after each line.

By mid-year most of the students had started a personal poetry collection. This assignment required gathering together a group of at least a dozen poems concerned with one chosen subject. "Snow," "Little Creatures," "Birds," "The Sea," were some of the titles, and the children were finding appropriate material in many anthologies,

worn books from home, the Bible, and Ogden Nash. As they browsed and leafed through the books, the shapes and vocabulary of poetry became very familiar, and rhythm, with or without rhyme, became more natural to them.

Here are the Calendars, all quite easily written and surprisingly varied, since the source was a group list. When questioned Mark insisted that his cat really did bring fleas into the house in winter time, so he was not forcing a rhyme! He was truly proud of guessing at "mart" then finding it in that oracle, the dictionary.

January brings the snows,
Time to have your snowball foes.
February has the rain
That patters on your window pane.
March has the winds that blow so hard,
And then you have your plants to guard.
April showers you will find.
Then you know the sun's behind
May baskets on your step,
And then so hot you have to sweat.
June is when our school is out,
Then we can all catch some trout.
July is when the fireworks bang,
And "Uncle Sam" the bell he rang.
August is when the corn is cut,
And then we plow to make a rut.
September is when school starts
And to make our lunches Cook goes to mart.
October is for Halloween
When tricks are played on everyone seen.
November is for Thanksgiving Day
And at the table we always pray.
December comes with Christmas trees
And the cat comes in with fleas.

Mark W. (6)

January is the start of the Year
Then February will soon be here.
March with its pussywillows and rain
Knocking on the window pane.
April brings rain and sleet
That freezes everybody's feet.
May brings flowers
That you can sit and watch for hours.
June is when school is out,
It's when you hear yells and a shout.
July brings Independence Day
When people are very gay.
August brings some very warm days
For swimming, and to be gay.
September brings Labor Day.
It's the day for fun and play.
October brings Halloween,
The time when witches and ghosts are mean.
November brings Thanksgiving Day,
The time when we give thanks and pray.
December brings Christmas time
When the church bells chime and chime.

Scott (5)

January is so snowy
And the wind is very blowy.
February brings invitations
To George and Abe's big celebrations.
March brings very windy weather
With my birthday, new as leather.
April starts the kites a-flying
And you need money for their buying.
May is when we get new flowers
And when gone are the April showers.
For teachers June means no more kiddies,
And big trips into the cities.
July is the best time for slumbers
Because the heat-waves come in numbers.
August comes with golden embers
And it goes with fine remembers.
September means back to School,
No more time for the swimming pool.
October brings us Halloween
When ghosts and witches can be seen.
November brings the winter season
And no-one knows the real reason.
December is the time for Christmas
And '65 will soon be with us.

Mike (5)

January brings snow.
February, the rains come and go.
April and May,
They bring flowers so gay.
June--you get away from books
And teachers' good and bad looks.
Boom! It's July!
In August you seem to cry.
September brings back books
And teachers' good and bad looks.
Oct. is for eight in October.
In November you feel good all over.
Ah! Sneeze!
If you're allergic to Christmas trees!

Richard (5)

One boy was engrossed in writing a story in serial form, one paragraph or two at a time, but managed to put it aside and scratch out a "Calendar" as quickly as possible since the teacher seemed to be adamant. His shortcut version is

January, February, March, April,
May, and June--and these do fill
Half our year. But do not fear,
There is still a one-half-year.

July, August, September,
October, November, December--
Now our year is quite well done.
When you look back, it was fun.

Reed (5)

From the parade of the months several children were inspired to write about the days of the week, and during the next few days rhymes like these turned up, independently, in various notebooks. Mark loves to write jingles, but obviously feels that the school could well dispense with the Friday afternoon folkdance class.

DAYS OF THE WEEK

Monday is for money
That I receive every week.
Tuesday is for papers
That are thin and very weak.
Wednesday is for delivery
That I make on afternoons.
Thursday is for basketball,
I play until I see the moon.
Friday is for weekend near,
Rhythm times I'll always fear.
Saturday is for lots of fun,
Sometimes even a bit of sun.
Sunday is for prayer and church,
And on a bench I always perch.

Mark W. (6)

Sunday's when at church you pray,
Monday's when you wash all day.
Tuesday's when the clothes you press
Wednesday's when you sweep the mess.
Thursday's when all day you rest,
Friday you are again refreshed.
Then, of course, on Saturday
You romp, and skip, and jump, and play!

Elizabeth (6)

"Colorless January"

The writing teacher always has at hand notes and page numbers for quick reference to the many beautiful poems about falling snow and snow magic. These are sure to bring the most interesting imagery to the children and from the children, and can very economically channel the excitement of the fresh snowfall through the children's minds and pencils safely into the notebooks. But snow, real snow, is necessary; the teacher waited in vain.

January was colorless. The windows framed nothing worth even a glance, yet the very bleakness of the winter was suddenly seen as a challenge for the writer. "Look out the window. How could you describe that blank landscape?" As the descriptive words came from the children, they were written in columns on the chalkboard under agreed-upon headings: "How it looks;" "How it makes me feel;" "Ways to say 'gray.'" Of course as usual the appropriate vocabulary was drawn from the children with great care and help by the teacher, who had previously made a list of possible categories and descriptive words as a lesson-plan. Always some new and unfamiliar word was introduced during the preparation for writing to give flavor to the already familiar. Once a child has used a word in his own writing, it belongs to him and he knows it in context.

The class searched their memories for vocabulary, and soon "overcast," "dull," "dreary," "bleak" (from a recent story in the reading text), "dark," "leaden," and "drab" (the teacher's introduction) were listed, with "silvery," as descriptions of appearance. It made one feel "lonely," "sad," "unhappy," "like hibernating," "dead," "gloomy," and, the teacher added, "desolate."

Reading aloud Robert Frost's "Pacific Shore" prefaced the writing period. Because the children had never before thought about the natural world in this way, they organized their expression of these strange ideas most carefully, depending heavily upon the chalkboard vocabulary and choosing even the titles deliberately and with personal satisfaction. The length of line, the poem shape, the flow of thought and emphasis, are recorded exactly as the children wrote them in their booklets, and are truly remarkable for their mood and variety of statement. A prose paragraph or a poem, rhymed or unrhymed, carried the writer's description:

JANUARY

In Oregon about this time it's wet and gloomy, with seagulls flying overhead. It feels so desolate and dull. I stay in the house and it seems like my brothers and my parents aren't here with me at all.

In the sky there are clouds all the time and I don't see snow, just wet and sloshy land. It should be cold enough to snow, but there's no snow, just cold wind and rain coming down.

Janet (6)

COLORLESS JANUARY

January, cold, dark and grey,
Sweeping floomy black o'er hill and bay,
Desolate people chambered in drabness,
Animals feeling their winter sadness,
Clouds overcasting the sky so bleak,
Children staying inside week after week,
Waiting for sunshine to fall at their feet.

Becky (5)

"Becky, where'd you find that wonderful 'chambered?'" the teacher asked as the writings were read aloud the next morning. "When I asked you for some other ways to say 'room' you said, 'How about that nursery rhyme word from "upstairs and downstairs and in My Lady's chamber?"' so I fixed that to fit," said Becky, simply. An art teacher brings clay to class to be modeled, and a writing teacher brings words to be "fixed."

One child had found it most difficult, during the fall, to write anything of her own. She excelled at dictionary and encyclopedia drills, wrote letters and simple narrative in excellent form, wanted to "please the teacher," but could not release her grip upon the familiar approved approaches. She copies phrases and ideas from the other children's work as it was posted upon the bulletin boards and admired, and was oriented and self-propelled toward teacher-approval and high grades on the report card. Bright and observant, she had been gradually discovering the fact that <u>everyone</u> seemed to have "approval," that there were no "grades" to be worried about each day, and that she herself had sources and springs of enjoyment and originality within her own mind. Here are her two "January" poems:

JANUARY

The day is dull and dreary,
No color to the sky.
Clouds, black and leaden, is the sky.
Drab is the weather, muddy and wet,
Trees bare and bony.
Alone, gloomy and bleak the day is--
No feeling around.

SEEDS

Seeds lie in the ground dead.
They are there
Because no sign of sunlight
Fills the dreary day.
The ground is frozen, hard, and stiff.
Winds blow chill through bony trees.
The seeds are surely dead.
Nothing could bring them to life
But the steady sunlight of spring.

Linda (5)

HILLSIDE IN JANUARY

As I stand alone upon a hillside looking down toward the deep and silent valley, with the day so bleak, I look at the trees with their skeletons waving back and forth in the wind. The sound of the wind is a silent cry up above; the clouds pass by like galloping horses in the wind. Their color, they have none, but a drab and leaden feeling they have. The fields are quiet; they are like ladies' skirts blowing in the wind. As I slowly walk down from the hill, two birds fly over me and give me a feeling of life.

Marzean (6)

JANUARY

The desolate sky
And the dull grey ground--
The birds are not out.
The wind blows lightly
Through the bare trees.
The children in their houses
Watch the rain fall through the air,
Splashing and lashing at the brush.
Fine feathers scattered on the ground,
But the gloomy month of January
Dies today.

Mike (5)

January, so dull and gloomy,
The trees, so bare and lonely,
The rain, pattering on the street,
The mud, under everyone's feet,
Grey skies, so drab and leaden,
The woods so still and deadened,
The muddy roads,
The muddy rivers
Flowing but still--
Why is it like this? So dull and dreary,
Everyone so gloomy and weary.
Because January is the month so desolate
and bleak.

Elizabeth (6)

Marzean wrote of a "silent cry," as Elizabeth wrote of rivers "flowing but still," not through trying to be "poetic" but through trying to describe clearly an almost indescribable idea, an elusive feeling about the unnaturalness of nature.

JANUARY

In January it's a sight
When everything is black and white.
The dark gray clouds are now above
And we can see a little white dove.
The day is very gloomy when the sun is never out
And the hours are always lonely with
the seagulls circling about.
And the weather, it is dreary,
With the dull and overcast, weary.

Rhonda (6)

DEATH

While the cold sleet and snow,
The foggy rain without a glow,
In a cave on top of an open hill
A baby cub is born very quiet and still.
The little bear plays wildly while the
mother sleeps.
He goes to the open door and takes a few
little peeps.
He walks outside and to a stream--
The poor little bear, no life will he have.

Mike (5)

The very next day, before the spirit and vocabulary had faded, the writings were read aloud by the teacher. Children give rapt attention to their own and their classmate's work when it is read appreciatively; their faces light up with a "did I say that?" pride, even when it is only a well put phrase or an especially fortunate word-choice that is read.

After sharing their somewhat derogatory writings about January, the class was asked, "Were we really fair to this month? Were we deliberately blind to some wonderful happenings in January? Is Nature dull, or are we looking with dull eyes? After all, the filbert trees are in tassels of bloom again." A reading of "The Seed Shop" by Muriel Stuart, and "Only the Wind Says Spring" by Helen Janet Miller started the class writing again with a very different slant. Linda's second poem has been recorded previously. Here are some others:

SLEEPING SPRING

The days are desolate and bleak. The days seem so dull, but through all this comes Spring like a little animal creeping along. The birds

sing, and filbert trees are wearing their best clothes. Spring is like a hibernating animal. It is asleep but soon will be awake.

Janet (6)

Trees will grow
And we soon will know
When January is over.
January is good
To flowers and grass,
So, if you could,
Grow buds, little trees,
For winter soon will be gone.

Dale (5)

In bleak January
There is life underground.
You may not see it--
The roots go down and out,
There's the starting of a sprout.
Everything seems to be dead--
But it's not so in the flower bed!

Richard (5)

SECRET SPRING

You may think that it is not here, but it is. Under the ground things are happening. The wind is calling, "Time to get up! Time to get up!" Everything is awake. Plants are sprouting, bulbs are rising. Tulips are hurrying, lilies are scurrying. But now we must return to our dismal earth and wait for spring.

Mark W. (6)

HIDDEN WONDERS

Beneath this lonely, drab appearance
Lies a beauty yet unseen,
In each bud a whole new world
Waiting at the touch of Spring.
In the earth a thousand roots
Are getting moisture from the rain.
When Spring comes she will reveal
All these things to us again.

Renée (6)

"Patriotic Spirit"
(birthdays and a Valentine)

February brings the patriotic spirit to full flower as the famous birthdays are celebrated in every classroom. This class wrote its own anthem to the stirring tune of "Our Director" by Bigelow, after listening several times to a band recording. The problem was to keep the marching beat steady, matching the syllables of the lyrics to the note lengths. The first stanza of "Our Patriotic Song" was written as a group project on the board, line by line, and was sung several times with appropriate fervor:

1. Proudly marching onward
   Waving our flag,
   Freedom we hold--
   Our feet will never drag.
   Washington, our hero,
   Led our country true.
   Hurrah for the flag,
   Our Red, White, and Blue.

From all the second stanzas written in the notebooks, the class chose three to add to their song. Reed practiced the drum-roll at home, and the next day around the room the boys and girls marched, the classroom flag held high, singing (somewhat sheepishly at first, then quite triumphantly) "Our Patriotic Song:"

2. See our banner waving
   As we march on,
   Symbol of Freedom,
   Keep it waving long!
   It's in our country's colors
   As Patriots always knew--
   The Flag of our Country,
   The Red, White, and Blue. Neal (5)

3. What a thrill to see it
   Fluttering by,
   Keeping in beat
   To bugle, drum and fife!
   God has helped our fathers
   Make this country free,
   So you must know
   What it means to me. Renée (6)

4. Loudly play the trumpets
   Sounding in time,
   Bugles will call them
   As they keep in rhyme.
   Old Glory, keep on waving,
   Keep our country true.
   Salute when you see
   The Red, White, and Blue! Connie (5)

Further February writings brought a rhyme about Lincoln, some musings about birthdays in general, and an ecstatic Valentine piece:

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Lincoln's birthday is tomorrow.
When he got shot, we were full of sorrow.
His birthday is on the 12th of February.
He also tried to demolish slavery.
When he led in the Civil War
He came out with quite a few scores,
And when he had captured Davis
That was the end, and he really did save us.

Mark W. (6)

When I think of a birthday, I think of people smiling and laughing. It's a day when you just feel your best. You feel merry and gay and then you give a scream of glee when you open a present. Everyone wears her best clothes and has so much fun on your birthday, the best day of the year.

Janet (6)

Everyone likes Valentine's Day
With its greetings so bright and gay
Bright red hearts hanging 'round the room,
All of us with our hearts a-bloom!

Becky (5)

"Early Easter"

Easter came early, before the tulips, but not before the chicks hatched in the incubator the first graders were tending. The class discussed the meaning of Christian Easter and the ancient springtime festivals with which it coincides. The pleasure of seeing the return of the sun, of longer days, of baby animals and flowers, and the marvel of the egg, which always looks like stone but is alive, were talked about in an effort to reconcile the various Easter symbols with which children in particular are surrounded.

Richard's homeroom had joined the incubator project for a science unit, and he had watched the hatching chicks:

EASTER CHICK

An egg,
A wonderful egg.
It looks like a rock--
It's a magical rock.
If you set it on a table
Nothing will happen.
If you're able
To do what I say,
(It's not like a horse born in the hay)
If you keep it warm
And do it no harm
Out will come
(It's amazing)
A little chick peeping.

Richard (5)

AWAITING THE EASTER SUN

Easter dawn is so quiet and calm
Awaiting the sun to brighten the day.
People are at church all reading a psalm,
Tiny children excited and gay,
The flowers are waiting to awake with the sun,
The people all waiting for it to come.

Becky (5)

Easter once again is here,
The time for frolic and good cheer.
Easter bunnies are hopping around
Hiding eggs in Frolic Town.

Scott (5)

Two jingles were derived partly from reading Rowena Bennett's "Meeting The Easter Bunny:"

THE EASTER BUNNY THAT STOPPED TOO QUICK

One day I met a bunny
A-going on his way.
He looked so very funny
As I asked him, "What's this day?"

"It's Easter Day, oh don't you know!
It's known all over the world."
And then while he was saying this
Away the bunny whirled.

"Oh, please wait," I said to him,
"Oh, can't you talk some more?"
And then he stopped so suddenly
The eggs went on the floor.

"I'm very sorry," I said to him,
And he was very mad.
"I'll pick them up and do them over,"
I said, so very sad.

I picked them up, but this reply,
"You know, they aren't made of tin--"
And then he hopped on down the road
And I never saw him again.

Janet (6)

EASTER

'Twas early one Easter
The day not yet here,
I went to each room,
Not a voice could I hear.

I went to the kitchen
And turned on the light.
I boiled all the eggs
That I'd put there last night.

I found a small paintbrush,
Some water-paints, too,
And set about painting
The eggs pink and blue.

I started to hide them
All over the house
When suddenly I heard it
As still as a mouse,

The scuffle of feet on
The pathway. O, 'lack,
I felt a small tingle
Go up my stiff back.

I was still as a log
Not daring to move,
When a voice right behind me
Said, "Put one in that groove."

I looked up and saw him,
All covered with fur
A snow white bunny.
On his coat were three burrs.

I smiled at him shyly
Knowing not what to say.
"You have a rough garden
Out back," he did say.

Well! I'd learned my lesson
It's not truthful to say
That I'll try this again
Next year's Easter Day.

Renée (6)

"Spring"

Spring makes a slow arrival in the Willamette Valley, yet children know it is progressing even under the long spring rains. Reading aloud a few "rain" poems helped alert the class to the possibilities of writing about this leisurely awakening and its signs and signals. Sara Teasdale's "April," Langston Hughes' "In Time of Silver Rain," and E.E. Cummings' "Chanson Innocente" with its "mud-luscious" and "puddle-wonderful," were enjoyed and after talking about fanfares, heralds, and harbingers, the class wrote:

HARBINGERS

The harbingers are the leaders of spring,
The leaders for a whole new thing,
A cotton dress with a longer hem,
Flowers like the facets of a gem.

Debbie (6)

The daffodil's a sign of spring
With birds fluttering by,
And the primroses growing, with
Birds as dark as the sky.

Tulips are just budding,
Crocuses are out,
Bees are starting to come out
And are fluttering about.

Rhonda (6)

Spring is a magic time. It's when people unfurl themselves from their buds and explode into a world of color. All around are harbingers of spring, primroses, daffodils, and the tiny trickle of jewel drops against a window pane. Winds blowing, and the trees swaying, inside this flower-bud of pastel color--all this is "Spring's Harbingers."

Becky (5)

SPRING'S MESSENGERS

During the winter
The world is sleeping
And then, out of nowhere,
Some birds come peeping.

They chirp and they twitter,
They flutter and sing;
When birds come a-flying
We know it is spring.

The beauty of Spring
Is beginning to show,
The crocuses, daffodils,
And primroses know.

The flowers are blooming,
The trees have their buds,
And all around you
Are birds splashing mud.

Renee (6)

Sometimes a child writes a poem which simulates the topic of the poetic work. Richard trailed his writing down the page like raindrops falling:

RAIN

Rain!
The messenger of Spring.
Rain!
It brings out a good thing.
Rain!
It patters sweetly,
It comes down neatly.
Rain!
The forerunner of Spring,
Rain!
It is a good thing.
Rain!
Pitter-pud!
Splash! Here's the mud!
Rain!
It means Spring!

Richard (5)

Every child wrote enthusiastically about this subject:

APRIL FOOL!

One day my friend's big sister said there was a spider in his hair. He said that he didn't believe her. She told him to go look in the mirror. He did, all right, but it was crawling down his neck.

Dale (5)

The time is here again this year
For April Fool's Day and good cheer,
Time for jokes and little tricks
To play on children just for kicks.

April Fool's is a special day
Just to play jokes on, they say.
Whatever the answer may turn out to be
You could thank April, just from me.

Timmy (6)

Sometimes even a carefully prepared lesson turns out a product very different from the results expected by the teacher. Children are full of surprises, and there was doubtless some magic in the vase of daffodils and narcissus that sent them off in all directions that morning, writing on the subject, "Descriptions of Daffodils." The discussion had been rather matter-of-fact, although it is difficult to be altogether pedestrian in talking about a flower so obviously like a hat or an old-fashioned telephone, and which cannot be described without using the words "trumpet" or "flaring." The teacher had in mind expository paragraphs describing the flowers, and this is what the children produced:

DAFFODIL

The daffodil I like and am going to write about has no name. It is not like a narcissus or hyacinth. It is a blazing orange with a long and thin tongue sticking out. It has a lemon-yellow star in an orange trumpet, like an eye in the middle. Daffodils in the garden, in the sunlight, are blowing softly in the wind.

Marzean (6)

A bunch of daffodils
are standing in a pot,
With their golden trumpets
playing red-hot.

Timmy (6)

The yellow of the trumpet is like the shine of gold. The white of the petals is like the glitter of silver, and the green of the stalks is like glittery shining emerald. Together they look like a priceless stone.

Billy (5)

A daffodil is a fluffy yellow
A daffodil is fiery orange.
A daffodil is a shooting star
With a white beam following it.

A daffodil is a gold cup
Sitting on a platter of moonstone white.
A daffodil is a ballet-dancer

On a little pear-white platform,
And an ultramarine stem standing erect.

Kathy (6)

Reed wrote a story that contained a "daffodil description," in the third paragraph, that is truly remarkable, extraordinary in its sensitivity and perception as well as in the expression itself:

THE WORM GOES EXPLORING

One day in early spring a squirmy worm sat on the ground where the stem of a daffodil met the ground. The worm looked up and saw the beautiful daffodil swaying above his head. "I wonder what a thing like that is like," he thought to himself, "but it looks like it's as high as the clouds, so I can't go up and see. So I'll go down and see what it's like below," he thought.

When the worm got down to the roots, he was disappointed. "I've seen daffodil roots before." The worm climbed to the top of the ground where he met a ladybug. "I wonder if you would climb that daffodil and come down and tell me about it," he said to the ladybug, and the ladybug agreed. So she started up the stem.

At first the stem was very thick, then it got thinner and thinner. After the ladybug had climbed about a foot on the stem, she came to some sort of tissue like a snake's skin that has come off. The ladybug climbed on the tissue for about an inch and pretty soon she came to the stem again, where she climbed another inch until she came to a bulge in the stem like the daffodil's pulse that had frozen still in the middle of a beat.

After she climbed over that, the stem got thicker and thicker until she came to some huge flaming petals. The ladybug walked around in a circle and counted the petals. There were six. Then she crawled over the trumpet and into the flower itself. It was like a bright yellow cave with a sort of stopper in the middle and prickly stick-like things all around it.

So the ladybug flew down to the worm and told him the story.

Reed (5)

One of the wonders of Springtime is found in the microscopic life of pond water. The Language Arts class had been exposed to the magnified drawings of protozoa spread over the bulletin boards by the enthralled investigators from the fifth grade science class. The jars of precious swampwater stood invitingly near the microscope-projector, the terminology was plainly visible on the charts, and the curiosity of the writing class was a palpable fact. To bring "literary" possibilities before the children, the teacher told them the story of "The Diamond Lens" by Fitz-James O'Brien, and there was some discussion of the protozoan's viewpoint. Everyone took a turn at the projector, looked at the tiny drop of water on the slide and in amazement at the projected creatures, then wrote:

MICROSCOPIC CREATURES

Little creatures are doing things,
And baby Volvexes are in a ring,
Squirming, wiggling, trying to get out,
And when they do, they swim all about.

The Cyclops tiny is running all around,
Doesn't know where for he is bound.
So serene is this [illegible] creature
Nobody knows he's p[illegible] of Nature.

Mark W. (6)

DROP OF SWAMP WATER

A drop of Swamp Water
Is like a microscopic world.
Serene they wave along in the drop,
The Cyclops, the Volvex, and the Daphnias,
Traveling in their own microcosmic galaxy.
They have their own universe,
These small creatures.
No one person knows how God created them.

Kathy (6)

When you look under a microscope, a whole new world unfolds before you, the serene miniature world of tiny creatures in a drop

of water. The green chlorophyl Volvex rotating in the murky swamp water, the poor Cyclops swimming silently under the blazing hot light of the microscope, and the Daphnia squirming to get out from under the heat are all destroyed as that tiny drop of muddy, murky swamp water dries up.

Neal (5)

Spring finally came in obvious ways, with pink and white flowering trees to write about. Children take little notice of trees, except as they suit the practical purposes of climbing up, hiding behind, chasing around, or eating from them. However there is a great store of literary treasure in poems written about trees, and no one who has thought about "Loveliest of Trees," by A.E. Housman, or John Farrar's "A Comparison," which compares apple-blossoms with snowflakes, can fail to bring better vision to a view of flowering trees. Before reading the poetry, the children talked about what flowering trees are like, and what they might mean in symbolic terms.

The children, by now, had a feeling for the fundamental movement of the earth around the sun, for the changing of the seasons and the scenery, so that to the question, "What significance might a flowering tree have? Is it a symbol of anything?" they easily answered, "It is a symbol of the returning sun, of Spring." The discussion led on to vocabulary of several kinds, visual and textural. What qualities of color do the trees possess? They are pink, white, creamy, pale, pastel (usually), carnation-hued and rosy. Their texture is lacy, fluffy, soft; and they look like bouquets like dressed-up people, like a party, like clouds, and like dancers. It was also brought out that trees are stubborn and tough although they look delicate in flower.

How do you like best to see flowering trees? In the "woodland ride," against new green grass, against dark firs, in contrast with the yet bare trees, or along the parking strips in rows? Why do new lawns almost always have a new little flowering tree? Is it only that they are "pretty?"

Before writing, Christina Rossetti's "Oh, Fair to See," translations from the Japanese of Rankō, "Plum Blossoms" (two haiku), "The Flowering Hills" by Eleanor Farjeon, "Loveliest of Trees," and "A Comparison" were read aloud, with a short excerpt from Bryant's "The Planting of the Apple Tree," in which the word "roseate" appears.

MY TREE

Here is a tree, a wonderful tree, standing alone in the emerald green grass, a tree full of color, glittering like gold blooming flowers of this glorious tree. Soaking in the sun's rays, sipping the cool water from the ground, most beautiful of all trees that I have ever seen, it's miraculous with its bonnet-shaped flowers.

Linda (5)

SPRING

Under the clouds the rosy trees
Whisper softly in the breeze,
And the snowy clouds above
Look as soft as "Mother Love."

Fishes in the sparkling pond
Swim about as if they're fond.
Birds in nests are singing sweet
Curled all up, above their feed.

Rhonda (6)

CHERRY TREES

The cherry trees in Spring
Have sweet cherry blossoms,
With many carnation petals.
Beneath the deep blue skies

The cherry trees look like
Ballerinas dancing softly.

Cynthia (5)

FLOWERING TREES

I walk through a land of enchanting silk and satin petals, like ladies skirts softly blowing in the wind with their levers so verdurous and firm, the flush of the coral blooms, so beautiful and graceful, like ballet dancers. Like soft and feathering clouds raining sweet and silky petals from heaven, Springtime is here again with white and pink petals, and the verdurous and firm trees.

Marzean (6)

MY MOTHER'S ORCHARD

My mother's orchard in the spring
Is such a lovely flowering thing.
I go to watch them every night,
Those lovely ladies all in white,
For soon I'd hear the slightest sound
Which goes to rustling all around.
The blossoms quiver, shake, and sway
And then they dance away, away,
Around the orchard, up and down,
No more attached onto the ground.
Faster! Faster! So light and gay
Until they almost fade away.
But sharp and shrill sounds the alarm,
So, sadly shaking lovely arms,
They make a bed upon the ground
Until the sun again will down.

Renée (6)

"Various Problems"

To gain variety in vocabulary the class sometimes settled down to make individual word lists, using the dictionary to compile a valid and interesting "box of paints" at the top of the page before writing. These "paints" they could then use, spelled correctly, in their brief composition period. Usually a short discussion preceded the solitary search, in this case for words describing the sea. The teacher circulated around the room as hands went up for help. "What's that word for when the water lights up at night?" asked one. "Do you mean 'phosphorescence' or 'luminescence?'" asked the teacher. "Yes, 'phosphorescent,' but how do you ever look that up?" Children have a large listening vocabulary, but a small writing vocabulary if they are not helped to use the words they almost know.

Mark wrote with his chronic tendency to play with rhyming words, and Reed wrote a story, as usual.

THE SEA

Under the sea it's beautiful, full of life and fun. The seaweed is green, the coral is many colors. Up above, the bouncy waves play with one another. Starfish creep and crawl, crabs walk and eat.

But down below there are scary things, monsters of the deep. It's very dim and dark down there where everything is all asleep. They swim about and hide in the jagged rocks. Down upon the very floor there lie some bones. Whose are they? Why, Davey Jones.

Mark W. (6)

The shimmering blue sea slaps gently
Against the ragged rocks, with frothy foam.
Under and beneath, azure waves are rumbling.
Sea-horses are swimming in the murky waters
Full of plants and dangerous fish.
Octopuses are lurking in caves, ready
For their victims.

Linda (5)

As the quiet evening settles down over the sea, the shimmering blue water is phosphorescent. The tiny sea creatures glide in the water leaving a little trail of bubbles behind them. The murky green kelp is waving back and forth.

Neal (5)

The sea on top is a beautiful blue-green.
It is a light foamy white
When the waters reach the shore.
It is a gleaming, glittering, elegant ocean.

But underneath it is a gloomy terrain.
It is dull and dark,
Blurred and obscure.
It is very lonely.

Scott (5)

Because the most glaring grammar errors and punctuation were steadily being marked in the daily writings, there was excellent opportunity for grammar drill, itself. The students varied widely in their ability to handle quotation marks and in their recognition of complete sentence structure and correct usage. Through direct teaching of parts of speech, it became possible to write "Incomplete verb. You need the auxiliary." or "You want the adverb, not the adjective" as criticisms, making the analysis of language useful in writing. Instead of using prepared materials from the text for exercises, the class worked the text suggestions orally, then wrote their own individual exercises. The "game" was to see how many times the rule could be demonstrated, and how interestingly incorporated.

"Dialogue"

I never talk to things. I think to things. In a catalog I think to it, "You turn to the right page or I won't use you!"

Then the catalog thinks back, "Ha! Ha! You know you need me and all you have to do is look in the index!"

Whenever I build something, I think to it, "You go right, or I'll use another one."

Then it thinks back, "Ha! Ha! You wouldn't use another one because they're hard to pick out, and if you use the wrench, I'll work!"

Richard (5)

One day just before my birthday I was very excited. I wanted the day to go fast. I looked at the calendar and said, "Can't you make the day go faster?"

The calendar answered back, saying, "I didn't invent time, you know." Then the calendar said, "I just keep track of the days, not time. You'll have to talk to the clock about time."

So I went to the clock and asked, "Sir could you make the day go faster?"

The clock answered, saying, "No one can make time go faster."

I said, "Thank you, anyway. I guess I'll just have to wait." And that is just what I did.

Becky (5)

It was the day I was going to get my spelling test back. When I got it, it was fourth grade level. I said to my pencil, "Why don't you spell good?"

"I don't know," it said. I was baffled to see that my pencil could talk. I went and showed it to my teacher.

She said, "Don't be silly! The idea of a pencil talking!"

I went back to my desk and said to my pencil, "Why didn't you talk to her like you talked to me?" There was no answer. I said it again and again, but to this day I've never heard my pencil talk again.

Neal (5)

One day I was riding my bicycle when I saw this rock in the street. I told it to move, or I'd hit it.

The rock said, "If you want to go by, go around."

"I don't want to go around. You'd better move or I'm going to pick you up and throw you into that field," I said.

"Go ahead and try it," he replied. So I picked it up and threw it into the field. "Ouch," said the rock.

I went over to see what had happened. The rock said, "Bury me by my father." So I buried him by his father on "Rock Hill."

Mark W. (6)

Cast: My mother and me

"Mom, can I have some bubble-gum? I asked.

"May I have some bubble-gum," she said.

"Okay, may I have some bubble-gum?" I asked.

"No," she said simply.

"But, Mother," I wailed, "Kathy's mother lets her have some!"

"That's her business," she answered.

"Oh, Mother!" I cried.

"Do you want to be sent to bed?" she asked.

"No," I said meekly.

"Okay."

"Oh, all right," I mumbled crossly.

"Renée," she said warningly.

"Okay, okay!" I answered.

Renée (6)

LIE and LAY

One day Farmer Brown was lying down on his couch for a rest before he went out to collect the eggs the hens had laid. He was thinking how he would like to be a bricklayer and make sure the bricks were set right.

After he had lain down, he decided to go and collect the eggs the hens had laid. He found that the hens had laid many big eggs. After he collected the eggs, he took them in and laid them on the table.

Mark W. (6)

Sometimes a child, tongue in cheek, slyly tries to play a trick on the teacher:

Our turtle likes to lay in the sand although our chicken does not.

Richard (5)

The class had begun to diagram simple sentences as a method of seeing the structure and parts of speech more clearly. One of the first tasks of the "diagrammer" is to isolate any prepositional phrases from the principal parts, and so, to facilitate recognition of such modifiers, the teacher asked for a paragraph containing as many prepositional phrases as possible. The problem for the teacher was to get the children to <u>stop</u> writing, not to <u>start</u>, after a list of prepositions was written on the board.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

. . . The boy beside the house chased the dog around the barn. The cat in stripes fell over the dog that was chewing on a bone. The girl who wore her Easter dress fell in the mud and landed on top of a bird.

Linda (5)

. . At one o'clock in the morning he decided he would go beyond all sight of earth. Within him he was getting quite hungry, although he had eaten fifty bananas, six carrots, seven oranges, and one coconut shell. With him he carried this much in case of an emergency snack...

Connie (5)

Above the clouds and over the moon Pegasus would fly. Throughout the world and beyond all sense of time he goes. Beneath the ground, amid the stars, away he zooms. Between the worlds and about the Milky Way, around the wind and in it, too, upon it he will play. Underneath the sea swimming 'round, past the water he will bound. Right outside he may be now, or on the moon. No one knows.

Mark W. (6)

"Limericks"
<u>(and dictionary ditties)</u>

Limericks are always entertaining to write, if the rhyme and rhythm form is adhered to as carefully as possible. The nursery tune for the rhyme, "Hickory, Dickory, Dock," serves as a guide and gives the emphasis that is needed until children sense the limerick pattern:

Pennies and nickels and dimes,
I can't think of any old rhymes.
   I'd write such a poem
   That I'd get sent back home,
If just I could think of some rhymes.

Reed (5)

There once was an old man from Mars
Who always ate candy bars.
   He tried to eat steak,
   His teeth started to break,
So he put them together with tars.

The fish with the feathery tail
Rammed into a very sharp nail.
   It went through his head
   And now he is dead,
The fish with the feathery tail.

Mike (5)

One day, after limericks had been enjoyed, the dictionaries were used for a limerick game. Several sets of three words each (femur, dreamer, lemur; lyre, choir, pyre) were written on the board, and each pupil was to choose any set, look up the words then use them in a rhyme:

There was an old man had a lyre,
He too had an excellent choir.
The lyre got burnt
And the old man learned
That it's not good to play in a fire.

Rhonda (6)

There was a fat man with a lyre
Who played very nice for our choir.
We had a bad fire
Which we didn't desire
And this man ended up on the pyre.

Janet (6)

The man with the broken femur
Got bit by his newborn lemur.
The poison injected,
The bite got infected
On the dirty old man called a dreamer.

Mike (5)

"Imaginary Zoo"

One week the bulletin board was covered with descriptions of imaginary animals, with illustrations in crayon. Children enjoy painting and drawing illustrations to amplify their writings. This story had a horrendously hairy and toothy picture attached:

FUZZY WIGGLE

I have an animal whose name is Fuzzy Wiggle. He is fuzzy all over and he always wiggles. He sleeps with me and eats with me and plays with me. He can climb trees and jump up to one hundred feet. He eats old rags and newspapers. He is a very nice pet.

If you would like one, just go to your friendly neighborhood store and buy some cherry pop, a Tootsie Roll, and some Kool-ade and feed them to your little brother or sister and you've got a Fuzzy Wiggle.

Neal (5)

"Happiness"

Grownups take great delight in the whimsies and youthful viewpoints expressed when children complete the sentence, "I am happiest of all when--." Here is a typical response from a girl, and an unusual answer from a boy. The class discussion had come to an end when someone volunteered that contrary to current belief, "Happiness is not a warm puppy but is a warm dry puppy." Children are ruthless realists.

I am happiest of all when my piano teacher says my pieces are fine and my lesson is over and I can go home now.

I am happiest of all when we are not going to have science after all.

I am happiest of all when I get somebody that I like for Rhythms.

I am happiest of all when we are going to have a Social Studies test and I think I know all the answers and I find out next day I got the highest grade.

I am happiest of all when our dog comes home from the kennel.

Becky (5)

I am happiest of all when I am working on something I like to do. I like to clean windows, vacuum the rug, mop the floor, and clean the bathtub. Sunday I did all these things because I didn't have anything to do. One day last summer I was mad at something, and my dad asked me to help him in the garden. After we were done, I felt lots better.

Billy (5)

"Colors"

Art classes in the district had been guided toward color schemes involving related hues, carefully choosing one side of the color wheel and deliberately using tints and deeper shades in

achieving composition. The children had worked in this way in colored paper and paint, so that the transfer of the idea to verbal compositions was easily made.

"How can you say 'red' without using that word?" The list on the board grew quickly: crimson, scarlet, maroon, rose, vermilion, magenta. The children were helped by remembering the labels on their crayon wrappings. "How does 'red' feel?" "Red is hot," they agreed, "but green is cool."

"Choose some part of the color-wheel," said the teacher, "and write a picture that will give the reader the feeling of the color, as you think of it, and will contain many ways to state the color itself. You'd better mix some paint at the top of your page." Out came the dictionaries where the "paint" is stored.

BLUE

When I look up into the sky, I see the pretty blue birds sailing, above the treetops but still below the turquoise sky. Blue makes me think of the sapphire ocean and the seagulls slipping through the clouds. The violet mountains in the distance seem to be fading away.

Rhonda (6)

Blue is the color of the clear sky.
Over the deep aquamarine sea
Are the sapphire rocks glowing from below.
The turquoise fish are swimming around in the sea.
Then at sunset the blue-green mountains are seen,
At this time the deep opal of the sky
And the last glimmer of the sun.
Then the deepest of the night is the violet, purple, Alexandrite sea.

Kathy (6)

GREENS and BLUES

Under the royal waves of the ocean, treasures lie still in the shimmering water. Every fish seems to be colored blue. Oysters deep in the moist sand hold glowing pearls. Aqua, turquoise, and sapphire refresh and cool, when you're down deep in those colors, beneath the sea.

Linda (5)

RED

Terrible, hot!
Clang, clash!
The fiery molten iron,
The men seemingly boiling, broiling,
Ultra-hot furnaces, crimson with fury.

The red-hot fiery fury of the lava
Determined to destroy!
An upheaval--Whoop!
The fiery-hot balls of flaming lava,
Lava from the red-hot core of the earth.

Richard (5)

BLACK

Black is a kitten so soft and cuddly, a kitten black as obsidian, not a mournful black but a happy black. A kitten has soft warm fur and eyes that shine in the dark. A kitten is made to see in the dark empty night, a playmate to play with every day, a soft black kitten to hold.

Cynthia (5)

WHITE

Cold! Bitter cold!
The icy air of the snowy nights,
The wheeling, wheeling of the kites, above.
A white sun beating down on white ground,
The whiteness of the trees,
Of the grass, and of a turbulent white sky.
The stillness of white background,
The action of the front,
Flurries of snow, gales up to fifty miles an hour,
The translucence of the crust of ice
Above the snow.

Richard (5)

Richard had written "flurried white sky" but came to the teacher for help. "What's a better word meaning going around and around and kind of whirling and stirring? There is a word but I can't quite think of it." "You seem to have a sort of weather-report, Richard. Sometimes the weather-man talks of 'turbulence.' Is that

it?" "Yes," said Richard as he turned toward his desk, "that's it." But he remembered "translucence" all by himself and spelled it lovingly, correctly. He has his own style:

YELLOW

Yellow! Flaming bright yellow!
The yellow golden sun, so gay.
Yellow! Slow, danger, equipment.
The yellow burst of flowers,
So frail to touch.

Richard (5)

Yellow is a superb color. It puts one into a happy daze and a sunlit day. Yellow is the golden-rod or the sunflower with bright yellow petals. The sun lights up things like stained church windows. Yellow is superfine!

Debbie (6)

BROWN

A chipmunk races through the treetops. The chipmunk's little russet body shoots easily around in the deep brown tree-top world. The chipmunk races over the pale brown limbs, its russet foot slips and it falls toward the bare ground, and a lean hungry wolf relishes the fall, but the chipmunk grabs a branch and swings itself to safety. A copper doe steps delicately out of the forest. The wolf flies over a fallen log and runs into a shiny brown bear. With a quick flirt of her tail the doe vanishes into the wood. A badger appears out of his hole and vanishes into the dead, pale-brown leaves on the forest floor.

Reed (5)

Dale had written a phrase startling in its imagery, so the teacher, to make sure that he understood the use of "verdant," asked him to elaborate. "Oh," said Dale, "that just means that all the little leaves look like flame-shapes coming out of the trees, but of course they're green." "It's very beautiful," said the teacher, somewhat ashamed:

GREEN

Green is refreshing,
Green is fragrant,
Emerald is cool and very calm.
Green is growing, like trees
On verdant fire.

Dale (5)

"Alphabets"

Writing an alphabet is amusing, but more than that it can provide selfdirected dictionary exercise and, in some cases encyclopedia and atlas experience, as well as demanding skill in holding to one consistent train of thought. After reading aloud some ABC's of both folk and authored origins, the children chose a topic and wrote:

ABC IN BOYS' NAMES

A is for Alan, who is so cute,
B is for Bob, the one full of loot,
C is for Charley, the fat boy we know,
D is for Dwight, always on the go,

\- - - -

W is for Walter, who wants to play a game
X is for Xenophon, oh, what a name!
Y is for Yang, he's a Chinese guy,
Z is for Zeb, who's a little shy.

Cynthia (5)

FAMILY ALPHABET

A is for Angela, my sister so gay,
B is for Brian, my brother I'll say,
C is for Cat that comes in every night,
D is for Daddy, so gay and so bright,

\- - - - -

I is for I, so slim and so tall,
J is for Jump, that's also called Fall,
K is for Kitty, so cuddly and sleek,
L is for Liver, so icky and eek.
M is for Mommy, so pretty and sweet,
N is for Nana, who is so neat,

\- - - - -

Y is for You, whoever you are,
Z is for Zebra, who is very far!

Mark W. (6)

MONSTER ALPHABET

A is for Allosaurus, a killer;
B is for Brontosaurus, a real diller!

\- - -

F is for Fafnir, a real sea-serpent
G is for Grendel's mother - - -

Dale (5)

Dale faithfully stayed with his topic of "Monster," using the whole alphabet, through "J is Jurassic, the era they lived in" to a final "Z is the city zoo when they are." The rhythm and rhyme were often cast out in favor of covering the subject thoroughly!

(from) GIRLS' ALPHABET

A is for Alice who loves cherry pie,
B is for Betty who always says, "Hi!"

— — —

W is for Wanda who loves to chat,
X is for no one; we can't beat that.
Y is for Yvonne who has yellow hair, and
Z is for Zenna whose name is quite rare.

Elizabeth (6)

Renee and Dale had chosen difficult subjects, as had Mark, who during his free moments for several days obstinately worked through encyclopedias and atlas to finish his alphabet:

ABC of GEOGRAPHY

A is for America, the best country of all,
B is for Belgian-Congo with jungles so tall,
C is for Congo that lies on the equator,
D is for Dominican Republic, where there's an alligator,
E is for Egypt with all its power,
F is for France with its Eiffel Tower,
G is for Germany, with which we had a war,
H is for Haiti, where we get a lot of ore,
I is for India, a country that's terrific,
J is for Japan that lies in the Pacific,
K is for Khartoum, the capital of Sudan,
L is for Libyan Desert which is full of sand,
M is for Mexico with all its mountains
N is for Nigeria with all its mighty citizens,
O is for Oahu which has a long beach,
P is for Panama almost out of reach,
Q is for Quebec, north of the United States,
R is for Russia, a country full of hates,
S is for Sweden, home of the Nobel Prize,
T is for Tokyo which is of great size,
U is for Uruguay where the people all toil,
W is for Wales which gives lots of people homes,
X is for Xanadu which is made just for poems,
Y is for Yukon which has a lot of snow, and
Z is for New Zealand which was here long ago.

Mark Q. (6)

Best of all, the children thought, was Billy's "Alphabet in Food." The form and style left everything to be desired, but even the teacher had to admit that the subject matter was unbeatable:

A is for apple pie so nice and crisp,
B brings the broth,
C is the cakes the cook bakes,
D is the drumstick on the turkey,
E is for eat, what we all like to do,
F is for food, what we all like to eat,
G is gum that we chew,
H is horsemeat for dogs, too,
I is ice-cream for a very hot day,
J is for jam we put on toast,
K is the kiss we give the cook,
L is a lemon so sour,
M is for mince-meat pie,
N is a nickel to buy some gum,
O is oranges so sweet,
P is for pepper to put on our potato,
Q is for quench, what water does to our thirst,
R is for rice that comes from China,
S is for soup so nice and hot,
T is turkey we eat at Thanksgiving,
U is unhealthy, which we are when we don't eat,
V is for "vittles" we give to the dog,
W is Wisconsin, a corn-growing state,
X is for Xmas when we eat fruit cake,
Y is yummy angel-food cake, and
Z is for zest.

Billy (5)

"$E=mc^2$"

Time is truly relative; one hour is not the same length as another hour. As one child wrote, "The clock in me ticks different. ."

When you are going someplace that you want to go to very much, the time seems longer. But when you go home and you want to be on the road longer, you get home quicker. When you go to the Dentist's and you want to be in the waiting-room longer, an hour seems like a minute. And when I am reading a comic book (I read them very often), I lose all track of time.

Neal (5)

Relative time is a quite fascinating thing. If you have ever waited to get on a roller-coaster, you know time just does not go fast enough . . . .

Connie (5)

"Sounds"

The sense of sight is written about far more than the other senses. Sometimes when the children shut their eyes, not literally but in imagination, they can remember very well sounds, touch, and even taste sensations and can record them in an interesting way. "What qualities do sounds have? For example, how is it measured?" The class responded with: pitch (high to low), loudness, rhythm, noise or harmony. Sound can: tinkle, blare, murmur, whisper, bang, swell and die away. And sometimes the names for the sounds are like the sound itself, as in: pop, hiss, crack, buzz, swish, chatter. As the list grew, it became clear that children possess a large vocabulary of onomatopoetic words which can be used as either nouns or verbs. "Let's take a scene within your own experience and describe the changing sounds using a variety of descriptive words so that the reader can hear it, too."

In the still morning you hear many sounds in the quiet house, the steady ring, ring, ring of the alarm clock. Immediately I hear someone in the kitchen making coffee, and the sound of the coffee can as the coffee is put into it, the constant purk of the percolater as it is boiling, the popping up of the toaster, and scraping of the toast as it is being buttered.

Connie (5)

In Norway when you wake up, you hear the sounds of the cowbells tinkling and some of them clanking. Now you hear the rooster with his hoarse pitch, the soft sound of the sheep coming down from the hills with their long shaky call. You hear the cows' splut-tering sounds as they walk through the slushy mud.

Anne-Lise (6)

The little sounds of children are flying through the air, the sounds of their little hands working on a piece of paper, and a numb sound coming from a crayon, the sound of the little, little babies playing with their blocks, the sweet talk of the nurses talking and playing with them. Then comes the squeaky sound of their mothers coming home.

Timmy (6)

Ultra-high-pitch roaring of a jet taking off,
It tears away your breath, you cough.
The tinkle of little bells,
A bird chirping,
A little frog gently croaking, croaking.
Clang! Clash! The steel mill uproars
Like the sound of waves upon distant shores.
B-r-r-r-room! A way far test,
C-r-r-r-boom! An earthquake, distant, distant,
The stillness of a still night you can almost hear,
With the sound of a coyote coming, coming to your ear.

Richard (5)

The alarm clock starts buzzing. "All right, all right," says a half-mad, half-sleepy voice upstairs. Click goes the button that turns off the alarm clock. The floor bangs furiously with the scamper of the 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5-year-olds running up and down the hall.

"Is breakfast ready? I'm late for school already."

"Everybody get up to the table."

"Would you please hurry?"

"Look at the bird in the gutter!"

"Hurry, get the dishes done before you're late to school!"

"Where's my milk money?"

"Get out my bike!"

"Hurry up, you're late already!"

I hear the sound of children playing as I walk up the sawdust path.

"How many Beatle cards do you have?"

"60."

"I have 72"

"I have a colored one."

"I have five colored ones."

"Let me borrow your comb."

Reed (5)

"Touch"

"Touch" is a sense connected closely by the children with "feeling," which may denote sentiment or mood, so that writings about the tactile sense will carry a natural emotional expression as well. In trying to isolate "touch" from this setting, the class wrote "guessing-games:" a paragraph to describe groceries, being unpacked from an imaginary supermarket sack, clearly enough that the contents could be named by the reader. "I reach in and my fingers touch . . " The class guessed very well until they were stopped by a strange, unearthly commodity that turned out to be a lettuce-head in a plastic wrapper. This does defy description!

The next day the children wrote about "Touch and Feeling:"

I like the feel of tiny babies because they're so soft. They are smooth and downy. If they have any hair, it is silken and fine. It's so nice to cuddle them, especially if it's a baby with a nightgown on. When I'm putting their socks on, I like to feel their feet because they are so squirmy, and so little they fit in my hand. I like to touch their fingers and hands because they are so very, very tiny and wiggly. Rubbing a baby's back is also what I like. A baby's back is soft and smooth. I like babies because they are soft and smooth.

Elizabeth (6)

FEELINGS

The burning feeling of broiling hot molten iron,
The unbearable cold feeling of sub-zero liquid oxygen--
These are only the extremes of feeling.
A downy feeling of soft quilts,
The rough rub of rubbing a bear's fur the wrong way,
A little pussy all cuddled up,
A summer breeze caresses you with warm air.
The mean blizzard stings with biting cold.

Richard (5)

I like the feeling of a bat connecting with a ball, and seeing it fly high over an outfielder's head and into the bleachers. It gives you the feeling of satisfaction that you have succeeded in what you set out to do. When you hit, you know it's the combination of your hips, legs, and wrists, and it takes coordination to do it right; but when you miss, it takes all the joy out of it.

Mark Q. (6)

I like to stroke the kitten's fur,
It feels so very soft.
I like to feel the prickly hay
Way up in the hay loft.

I like to touch the little birds
With feathers rough or smooth,
I like to feel the caressing wind
Blow slow enough to soothe.

Rhonda (6)

I like to touch with both my hands,
To scoop my hands. It's raining sand!!

Mark W. (6)

I love to go walking along the white sandy beach, with a moonlit sky above and the softness of the wet sand in between my toes, the soft and gentle waves sleeking through my toes, washing the sand away . . .

Marzean (6)

I love the feel of my toes in mud, the oozy touch of it squeezing onto the ground, the sticky feel when I sink up to my ankles, the splatter as I pat it into the different

shapes. All this, I love. But then, the disgusted feeling when Mom tells me to come inside before I catch cold.

Renée (6)

"Taste"

"Taste" is more difficult to write about than "sound" or "touch," and the class found that analyzing the pleasures of food in the mouth involved them more in "touch" and "smell" than they had realized when the discussion started. Lists were short.

The sweet chewy candies water in your mouth. The bitter chocolate melts in a soft red cavern. At dinner the delicious roast throws a slight fragrance through the air, in graceful harmony.

Mike (5)

I like French-fries. When you bite into that soft chewy texture, you can taste the delicious potato inside. The salty juice comes out of it and goes into every corner of your mouth. It is crisp and sinewy.

Neal (5)

"Situation Stories"

Children enjoy writing stores and hearing them read aloud, but it is necessary to emphasize brevity and clarity of plot, as well as to provide possible situations about which to write. A teacher who has once attempted to grope any sensible path through five pages of "and then this man," and "and then that man," and "so he went over there and then," will not be caught a second time in the same maze. In a program of frequent writing and equally frequent correcting, stories must be held to one page if possible.

This "situation" story motivation was the source for an interesting little writing in each booklet: "I was walking along past a house when I noticed a man on the roof frantically working at something I couldn't see. What in the world was he doing?"

MAN ON THE ROOF!

One day I was cutting through people's yards and I saw a man on his roof. I guess it was his roof, anyway. He seemed to be raking or hoeing at something, so I climbed up and took a look. He was making a garden.

I asked him why, and he told me that his neighbor's chickens were getting into the other garden. I asked him why he didn't just kill the chickens, and he said I talked too much.

Mike (5)

I was walking along the street one day when I heard loud bangs coming from a roof down the street. It turned out to be an old man firing a rusted shotgun into the air. I asked him what he was doing and received this reply, "I'm makin' rain, Sonny, rain."

Well, the next thing I knew, he was shooting again. As I continued my walking, I noticed something on his door which read, "Amos Pepperwinkle, Rainmaker."

Mark W. (6)

On an ordinary morning one of the boys said suddenly, "Hey, what's that up there?" He pointed to the sky, and the usual tidal wave of attention pressed the children toward the windows. The teacher, somewhat myopically, squinted in the direction of the pointed finger and saw a blurred dot. But the children saw a plane, a kite, a blimp, or most probably, some thought, a flying saucer. To the teacher it was a remarkably inexpensive teaching device, and since it would not be necessary to further interest the class, writing could begin immediately, while all the little irons were sizzling hot.

"Please describe what you saw very carefully in your booklet, and draw a little picture--because I want to see it, too, and I couldn't reach my glasses quickly enough." The writings were carefully matter-of-fact but without much agreement among them. That night the newspapers carried rumors of strange aircraft and the next day the class wrote "stories" like these:

(from) MY FLYING SAUCER EXPERIENCE

It all happened yesterday, when I looked out the window. I thought for sure it was a flying saucer so I went outside and looked up at the sky. Out of the blue of the western sky came "Sky Martian." As I stared at it longer, I could see the words "YOU ASKED FOR IT" printed on the side of the ship. All of a sudden the saucer landed in front of me and . . . .

Becky (5)

The Flying Saucer is just a balloon,
But maybe inside there is a goon
Taking refuge from the rain---
Maybe we'll never see it again.

But then one day the balloon will break,
Then ladies will say, "For Heaven's Sake!"
And then he'll fall right through the air
And people will wonder where, oh where?

Mark W. (6)

"Descriptions"

Descriptions of people we know demand skill in observing what the appearance is and, even more important, what qualities show only in his activities, his real self. On this day the discussion centered about Abraham Lincoln, his homely appearance yet beautiful expression, and the qualities we see in his face as we bring to our vision the knowledge of his attitudes and beliefs. "Write about someone you know, someone you admire, and describe how he appears and how he is. You don't need to say who it is--just give a careful description." The children wrote about each other, about grown-ups, and relatives, and in all cases gave true and deep reasons for their admiration. Richard was the only student who preferred to despise all mankind, which is farther along toward adolescence than most ten-year-olds have progressed.

SOMEONE I ADMIRE

I admire an elderly person who knows how to fish like the greatest of fishermen and hunts like the greatest of huntsmen. He can do almost anything! He is a tall, well-built man with silverish black hair and a rough tan face. He has built a cabin as a vacation home for all of his relatives. He expects what I can do and what I can't. This man is my rehtafdnarg.

Jim (6)

I ADMIRE

I admire a sturdy oak
To stand the turbulence of winter snows,
To stand when the gale blows.
I admire the flexible wisteria,
So strong, so beautiful,
Slowly, slowly strangling the apple with
its fierce pull.
I admire the fox, so cunning
To set the meek hare running--
So beautiful all over, except the killing.
I despise the blackberries so sticking
And mean.
I despise men with their axes and guns,
Come trampling through, like bums.

Richard (5)

"Onomatopoeia"

Playing with the actual sounds of words is of course part of the writer's fun. Children enjoy the very sound of the title, "onomatopoeia," and like to make their writings reflect their understanding of the meaning of such a wonderfully important-looking word. On their level, the list consists mainly of simple one-syllable words, but if there isn't an exact sound-replica

at hand, the children will be happy to contribute an original invention.

I like to hear the chickens chirp
almost all day long,
And also hear the snapping or
the clipping of a thong.

I like to hear the mooing of a
cow, pink, black, or brown,
And listen to the little bell
a-tinkling close to town.

Rhonda (6)

"Alliteration"

Alliteration is another poet's game to play, not altogether for "poetic" reasons. Like alphabet-writing, attempts to alliterate send the child to the dictionary to search for words that are usable. Many of the children use this sound-pattern naturally, without being conscious of its part in choosing words, as for example when Linda wrote of the sea, "The shimmering blue sea slaps gently/ Against the ragged rocks, with frothy foam," and Scott wrote, "It is dull and dark/ Blurred and obscure." Even when the reader does not quite understand the meaning, reading aloud such alliterative passages is an enjoyable experience in itself. Here are examples, excerpts from page-long exercises:

Willie wandered off to Wales one day upon a walnut shell . . .

Becky (5)

Scott got stung by a scorpion in a cave of stalactites. He stood and stared at the sting . . . He picked up a stone and stuck it in his sling-shot, took a stance . . .

Mark Q. (6)

Randy hit Rachel with a dead rat. The rat had rabies and Rachel ran . . . Randy roughly threw the rodent into Mrs. Repas' rocking-chair . . . Rachel rapped Mrs. Repas with her rake and Mrs. Repas reddened, and rotted, and rolled away.

Neal (5)

Sleepily stopped Sue in her station wagon. She skidded and slid down the street . . . smoothly, straight through a store stockroom. Suddenly she stopped, since she struck a stone wall.

Les (6)

. . Now the spotlights are shining, the band is singing, but where is she, the silver-saddled horse? She soon runs softly in her satin bridle . . . stops swiftly so as not to stamp on the Strongman.

Anne-Lise (6)

"The Circus"

Four large art-prints of circus folk were tacked to the bulletin boards: "Seated Acrobat" by Picasso; Seurat's "Circus," "L'acrobate" by Chagall, and Pechstein's "Circus." The paintings were discussed, and gradually the lists took shape on the chalkboard, as the children remembered circuses, carnivals, and fairs. The headings were "What do you see?," "What do you hear?," and then "Smells," "Feeling," and "Tastes." Several poems were read, "Circus" by Eleanor Farjeon, and Rachel Field's "A Circus Garland," which is an excellent group of poems about the parade, acrobats, and the animals. "The Circus Parade" by Olive Beaupre Miller, Elizabeth Madox Roberts' "The Circus," and "C is for the Circus" by Phyllis McGinley are all enjoyable, as is Lenore M. Link's "Holding Hands," an elephant jingle.

After talking about the excitement, the fright-and-relief, the costumes, the show from the point of the performers, and the skill and balance of the troupe, and adding the word "equestrienne" to the list of jugglers, strong-

men, and trapeze artists, the children wrote:

THREE RING CIRCUS

Boom, boom, boom! The trapeze, the equestriennes, and the clown are all beginning to work. The trapeze is swinging, the equestriennes are riding, the clown is dancing a funny little jig. While all this is happening, the spotlight, the glitter, the sparkle are all on the man on the trapeze in the center ring.

Debbie (6)

CIRCUS

Hurray! The circus has come to town,
And all the kids jump up and down
And beg their moms and dads to go,
For anyone in town could know
They love to hear the big band play
And see the clowns so funny and gay.
But most of all they like the time
The acrobat begins his climb
To the very, very top of the tent,
And from there on your time's well spent
To see him dive so gracefully low
To a tank of flaming water below.

Renée (6)

CLOWNS

A clown is a funny thing--
He makes you laugh,
And he makes you sigh.

They play tricks
And pretend to die,
Laugh at each other
And then start to cry.

Billy (5)

EQUESTRIENNES

Out come the equestriennes
On horses so gay.
With one foot they balance--
Ah! They're beginning to sway!

The ladies are dressed in glittering pink,
They are on pearl-white horses
Which are circling the rink.
The ladies are standing straight and tall,
Trying so hard not to fall.

The leader starts to go out of the rink
And all the other ladies in pink
Without any heed
Go right out the door
At a very fast speed.

Elizabeth (6)

CIRCUS CLOWNS

Clowns are jumpity, twirling things
Acting off in all the rings,
Different clothes and hats they wear--
Under their hats there's stringy hair.

Out they'll come in single file,
There they'll stay for awhile,
Hitting, slapping, and kicking, too--
This is what they'll always do.

Mark W. (6)

CIRCUS

Whenever you go to a circus
It seems that you mostly see clowns,
That is, between shows,
And they have such big toes
That it takes up the big ring.
With a big sound of horses
They all take their courses
And run right out of the ring.

Anne-Lise (6)

"Gold and Silver"

Long ago the teacher had memorized some poetry during a star-gazing period, and of that collection two seemed most appropriate for schoolroom use: Walter De la Mare's "Silver," and "My Star" by Browning. The children were quickly saying "Slowly, silently, now the moon . . . " with the teacher, and after repeating the poem several times, attention was called to the way in which the whole landscape is described as bathed in silver, with no other color except white, and shadow, mentioned. "If he can do that with silver, why can't we try it with gold? What would you choose to describe as golden?" "Silver is cool, but gold is warm," the class decided.

The last bulletin-board of the year held these writings, illustrated by gold paper cut-outs and a silver moon and star:

GOLD and SILVER

The day is full of golden things,
Golden trees and golden rings,
Shining bright in the air
Golden leaves and maidens fair.

The night is full of silver things,
Silver stars go ting-a-ling,
Gleaming bright both near and far,
Silver planets and a silver star.

Mark W. (6)

GOLD

Flaming wildly the gold sun appears; it rises slowly in the gold summer morning, and in the jungle sun, there's a gold tiger in the shadow of the trees.

Anne-Lise (6)

Gold is the color of the softest hair,
Gold is the color of a sun-ripened pear,
Gold is the color of a mountain stream
Laden with rocks to catch the sunbeam.
Gold is the color of a hill so high
Just when the sun is set low in the sky.
Off in the distance a golden bird calls
And from a tree a golden leaf falls.

Becky (5)

The glowing gold beams of the sunlight shine through my window pane in the morning. The sun wakes me in the morning with direct beams in my face.

In Salem the top of the Capitol is gold and it shines in the dark . . .

Janet (6)

SIGHT OF GOLD

I see the sun settled in the sky
With golden colors spread through the sky.

A lonely tree stands in a vacant field
With golden limbs and amber leaves.

A flock of birds fly quickly over the
golden sky
And stop at the amber tree.

A soft bushy squirrel scampers across the
vacant field
And up the golden amber tree.
Now I see a sight of gold, made by a settled
sun.

Cynthia (5)

SUNRISE

The golden sphere rises above and over the sparkling mirror-like lake. A golden sunbeam touches a golden bird. It flies away into the horizon and slowly disappears. A golden beam of sunlight shines upon the beautiful leaves of a golden tree.

Neal (5)

SILVER and GOLD

Cool: a garden in the moonlight. Silvery iris are blooming in a cluster of glistening leaves. The grass sparkles with dew.

Glowing: The King's treasure with bright fluorescent rays. Golden beams shed from moon-yellow stones fill the court with light. Copper-yellow statues stand in a courtyard full of the glowing sun's rays.

Renée (6)

I would like to go somewhere where there are golden things, golden flowers, golden schools and golden churches, and even golden hair, where you could cut with golden scissors and climb on golden bars. I would like to go there for a year and watch the golden sun go down into the golden sea.

Rhonda (6)

Gold can be anything,
Pretty or not;
The reflection of Moonlight
On a silvery snail
Makes it as gold as ever.

Mike (5)

Golden fish in the waters flow,
Brightest gold in the winds shall blow.
The golden stallion puts up a fight
As a golden rattler acts his right.
The beautiful gold of the sun so hot
Down among the leaves and rot--
The darkened waters of the streams shall glow
As the sun's reflection will hit so low.

Connie (5)

The golden sun sweeps across the sky
Not like a disk hurtling by
A golden hill with golden trees,
Golden flowers with golden bees.
Golden clouds go drifting by
In a golden, misty sky.

Jim (6)

The one dissenter from the general tone of enchantment was a boy whose recent experiences were less moonlight than misery:

> Silver is a frightening color. The dentist fills your teeth with silver fillings. All his drills are silver. At the orthodontist's the braces are silver and when they're put on, they hurt.
>
> Mark Q. (6)

"Agates on the Beach"

As the classes write, year after year, the teacher has the sensation of walking along the beach, waves tumbling in, each one different yet all alike, and all tossing the pebbles and shells so that the pattern changes with each surge and ebb. Occasionally an agate shines more brightly against the sand, and goes into the teacher's pocket to be taken out later and held and admired partly for itself, partly for the child to whom it belongs, partly because it is so like all the other agates in its origin. For the teacher, finding and polishing a beachful of "agates" is the "funnest" thing.

Teaching children to write is often a reverse process, of the child's teaching the teacher to read, to hear, and to appreciate the expression of ideas from the minds of children, who will never again be that age, whose growing up is inevitable, and whose viewpoints will never again be quite the same. Grown-ups remember the joy of "toes in the mud," but few grown-ups feel that joy. The writing notebooks, corners battered and spiral wires unwinding dangerously at both ends, are like snapshots of the children, to be treasured, and the child who has enjoyed writing about his own experiences, real and imaginary, will keep his book, read it, and perhaps learn more and more, as his reading grows, from the notes made by the teacher.

The language teacher muses, with some envy, "I wonder what I thought, really. I wonder what I would have said and how I would have said it--if any teacher had ever asked me. . . . "

END

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